

# Art in America

## Peter Cain at Simon Watson

Peter Cain's first New York solo show consisted of abstracted images of Mazda Miatas and Porsche Carreras rendered in a slick Photo-Realist style. Cain willfully condenses the automobile's form, producing a series of paintings depicting one-wheeled fetish objects, with front and rear fenders fused uncannily together. No doubt to further this element of abstraction, some of the images in this exhibition were inverted or hung sideways, as was the case with *Miata #8* (1991). The wheel and hubcap

combination acts as the focus for each composition and pointedly imbues the work with the sexually charged connotations of a target.

Since the "Horseless Age" began in 1895, the automobile has been one of the most potent symbols of our time. From the moment of its introduction, the automobile was seen as a sex symbol. In 1900, Freud recorded the case of a patient who related a dream which took the form of a joke. The patient dreamed that he had been kissed in a car by his uncle—it occurred to him later that the reference was to *auto*-eroticism. The terrain which Cain chooses to explore is that of abstracted eroticism and the variety of "perversions" that those two oddly conjoined terms imply. It hardly need be pointed out that his truncated automobiles abbreviate the body of the car in favor of its most easily fetishized parts. Cain plays unashamedly off old clichés about the automobile as the ultimate phallic object.

Cain's show was accompanied by an interesting text by Klaus Kertess which focused on the narcissism inherent in Cain's work, while simultaneously making the claim that the artist's



Peter Cain: *Miata #8*, 1991,  
oil on linen, 93 by 48 inches;  
at Simon Watson.

painting "threatens the masculinity of automotive referentiality." According to this viewpoint there is something surrealistic about Cain's work and—no doubt because of the physical deformation of the objects it depicts—something distinctly castrative. There's no question that these paintings avoid the trappings of those sexist automobile advertisements which exploit female models by using sex to go for the "hard sell." But, it seems to me, far from opposing phallocentrism, these paintings amount to rather blatant icons in celebration of virility and the male member.

—Simon Taylor